



PANHANDLE

BENEWAH, BONNER, BOUNDARY, KOOTENAI, & SHOSHONE COUNTIES

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

An indication that the Panhandle's economy is picking up steam is the drop of the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate from 7.9 percent in September to 7.7 percent in October. The unemployment rate was six-tenths of a percentage point lower than the same month the year before. See Panhandle Table 1 for details.

The Panhandle lost approximately 1,190 *Nonfarm Payroll* jobs between September and October, which is a normal job loss between September and October. Comparing October 2003 to the same month the year before provides more evidence that the economy is picking up. In those 12 months, the Panhandle added about 1,020 *Nonfarm Payroll* jobs with more sectors gaining jobs than losing jobs. The sector experiencing the greatest job loss—*Professional & Business Services*—is the sector that experienced the greatest job gains between 2001 and 2002. That sector's losses are the result of layoffs at call centers and downsizing of professional employment organizations (PEOs). One reason for re-joining is the 130 jobs gained in *Manufacturing* between October 2002 and October 2003. Job gains at a variety of manufacturing operations in the 12-month period helped offset the 140 jobs lost when Louisiana-Pacific closed its Bonners Ferry mill September 19.

This year, the Panhandle ski areas have been blessed with abundant, powdery snow. All three opened by Thanksgiving. Last year, lack of snow prevented the Panhandle ski areas from opening until late December. Even after they opened, poor snow conditions persisted, keeping skiers and snowboarders away through Christmas week, the most lucrative week of the year. The weather so far this year suggests that this year will be much more profitable for the ski areas and for the other retail and service businesses that rely on skiers, snowboarders, and snowmobilers.

AREA DEVELOPMENTS

Benewah County

- Economy Hardware on St. Maries' Main Avenue will close at the end of 2003. The hardware store has operated at the same location for 56 years. Some

Panhandle Table 1: Labor Force & Employment

	Oct 2003*	Sept 2003	Oct 2002	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
Seasonally Adjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	91,540	92,760	91,660	-1.3	-0.1
Unemployed	7,060	7,290	7,600	-3.2	-7.1
% of Labor Force Unemployed	7.7	7.9	8.3		
Total Employment	84,480	85,470	84,060	-1.2	0.5
Unadjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	90,240	92,820	90,480	-2.8	-0.3
Unemployed	5,620	5,460	6,120	2.9	-8.2
% of Labor Force Unemployed	6.2	5.9	6.8		
Total Employment	84,620	87,360	84,360	-3.1	0.3
JOB BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs** - NAICS	71,290	72,480	70,270	-1.6	1.5
Goods-Producing Industries	14,300	14,340	13,760	-0.3	3.9
Natural Resources & Mining	1,640	1,640	1,720	0.0	-4.7
Construction	5,590	5,500	5,100	1.6	9.6
Manufacturing	7,070	7,200	6,940	-1.8	1.9
Wood Product Manufacturing	2,710	2,830	2,890	-4.2	-6.2
Other Manufacturing	4,360	4,370	4,050	-0.2	7.7
Service-Providing Industries	56,990	58,140	56,510	-2.0	0.8
Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	13,790	13,870	13,410	-0.6	2.8
Wholesale Trade	1,450	1,470	1,360	-1.4	6.6
Retail Trade	10,560	10,610	10,350	-0.5	2.0
Utilities	390	390	380	0.0	2.6
Transportation & Warehousing	1,390	1,400	1,320	-0.7	5.3
Information	1,110	1,130	1,240	-1.8	-10.5
Financial Activities	2,920	2,990	2,910	-2.3	0.3
Professional & Business Services	6,350	6,550	7,020	-3.1	-9.5
Educational & Health Services	7,030	7,040	6,770	-0.1	3.8
Leisure & Hospitality	8,460	9,340	8,130	-9.4	4.1
Other Services	2,110	2,150	2,210	-1.9	-4.5
Government Education	5,250	4,870	5,240	7.8	0.2
Government Administration	8,700	8,910	8,460	-2.4	2.8
Government Tribes	1,270	1,290	1,120	-1.6	13.4

* Preliminary estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

of the hardware's business will be moved to the Tenth Street Lumber Yard, owned by the hardware's owners Jim and Martha Scourey. Lack of business during the last two years forced the Scoureys to close the hardware store.

- This fall, Sharon Smith opened Natural Beauty Salon at 155 South Eighth Street in St. Maries.
- Benewah County Waterways Committee recently increased access for swimmers, fishers, and boaters by adding 300 feet of docks along the St. Joe Riverfront from Aqua Park upstream.

Bonner County

- Sandpoint celebrated the 40th birthday of Schweitzer Mountain Resort on December 4. The recreation area plays a major role in Sandpoint's economy, especially during the winter months. More than 600 people work

for Schweitzer during the ski season. In addition, dozens of other people work for the various businesses in and around Schweitzer Village. The spending by Schweitzer's visitors also keeps many Sandpoint businesses operating through the winter months. Adding joy to the celebration was the rave review *Sunset* magazine gave Schweitzer in the issue that hit the newsstands November 22.

- For the 2003-2004 ski season, Schweitzer added an Activity Center in the White Pine Lodge that refers visitors who are seeking services to local businesses—including dinner reservations, massages, guided snowshoe hikes, snowmobiling, and climbing walls. In addition, the Selkirk Powder Co. opened to offer guided ski tours of the backcountry. Stiles, an outdoor outfitter carrying name-brand equipment, is another new business at Schweitzer Village.
- Blue Moon Café recently opened in the former Ivano's building at 124 South Second in Sandpoint. Owned by Kim Duffy, the café serves a variety of breakfast items, soups, and sandwiches, and employs 10 people.

Boundary County

- The Wreath Farm near Bonners Ferry, owned by Travis and Julie Smith, makes Christmas wreaths and garlands that contain fresh cedar, pine, fir, and spruce. Some wreaths are simple circles, some are shaped like candy canes, others are elaborately decorated. The Wreath Farm's website, along with repeat business, has helped the company expand. Last year, they made 2,300 wreaths; this year, they expected to make 4,000 wreaths for customers around the world.

Kootenai County

- Sysco Corp. plans to build a \$25 million distribution center immediately north of Interstate 90 on the western edge of Post Falls. Sysco is the nation's largest food-service distributor, supplying 420,000 restaurants, hospitals, schools, and other businesses that serve food. Currently Sysco serves the Inland Northwest from Seattle, Portland, and Boise, so the Post Falls center will reduce transportation costs. The 140,000-square-foot center will contain offices, freezers, coolers, and dry storage. When it opens in the spring of 2005, it will employ 150 to 200 people including warehouse workers, truck drivers, and sales, marketing, and accounting staff.
- Phillips Plastics Corp. will close its injection molding plant in Post Falls at the end of 2003, putting 30 people out of work. When the Wisconsin company built the plant at Riverbend Commerce Park in 1996, it expected to increase its customer base in western states. Those expectations never were realized, and increased Asian competition has forced the company to close the Post Falls plant. Phillips is providing transition assistance to the workers affected by the closure. The Coeur d'Alene Job Service also is helping the Phillips workers.

- A 2,700-square-foot Toro Viejo Mexican Restaurant opened in Mid-November next to Super One Foods in Rathdrum. There are four other Toro Viejo restaurants in Kootenai County.
- Businesses recently opening in Post Falls include a 15,500-square-foot Walgreens drugstore at 708 East Seltice Way; All 1 Office, selling computers, computer accessories, other office equipment and supplies, in the Prime Outlets; Petticolas & Son Financial, providing retirement and benefit planning, at 4751 Selway Avenue in Riverbend Commerce Park; and Highlands Day Spa, offering massages and relaxation, as well as a full-service beauty salon, and Plastino's Bistro and Wine Bar, both in the former Highlands Restaurant overlooking Post Falls.

Shoshone County

- American West Bank celebrated the grand opening of its Wallace branch on November 20. The new branch, which is located inside Excell Foods and includes a drive-up window, is a full-service operation offering loans. American West (formerly the Bank of Latah) also has a branch on Railroad Avenue in Kellogg.
- Silver Mountain Resort in Kellogg opened its ski area November 25 with great snow conditions. Earlier this year, Silver Mountain spent \$500,000 to update its gondola, which is the world's longest such gondola. In addition, it cut four new ski runs, expanded its half-pipe, and created a terrain park for beginners. The resort is open seven days a week with night skiing on Friday and Saturday nights. More than 200 people work at Silver Mountain during the ski season. Skiers can visit the new restaurant at the gondola base—Terrible Edith's Bar & Grill—which serves Italian food, steaks, and microbrews on tap. Silver Mountain's owner, Eagle Crest, plans to turn the ski area into a multi-season destination resort, and plans to build a retail village and up to 75 new lodging units over the next few years.
- Lookout Pass Ski Area along Interstate 90 near the Idaho-Montana border added five new ski runs and a double chairlift this year. The runs effectively raised the mountain's vertical drop from 850 feet to 1,150 feet. The additions are part of a \$4 million plan to upgrade the ski area over five years. In 2004, Lookout plans to build a 4,000-square-foot addition on its lodge. Over the next four years, it will add more ski runs and chairlifts. This ski season, Lookout is open five days a week. Traditionally, it has been open four days a week. Lookout, which opened almost two weekends before the larger ski areas, employs about 60 people this ski season.

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